



News Release

For Immediate Release December 17, 2010		Contact: Roy Stearns	Contact: Alex Peabody
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Have FUN, but think SAFETY!

State Park Lifeguards Prepare For Winter Swells, Urge Safety First

As the winter storms come ashore and sweep through the Sierras, many people think about cozying up next to the fireplace, a warm cup of coco, or perhaps a powder-run at their favorite ski resort.

This is California though and that means surfing—even in the winter when the water temperatures are in the 50's and big waves are forecasted.

“Some of the best surf happens in the winter months along the California coastline.” says California State Parks Aquatic Specialist Alex Peabody.

In visitor surveys, one of the primary reasons for visiting parks has something to do with water. Whether passively recreating by walking along a beach, or viewing California's spectacular coastline, or putting on a wetsuit to surf, body board, or play in the ocean — Californians love the water.

“Winter can be a particularly dangerous time for aquatic recreation in California State Parks,” warns Alex Peabody, Aquatic Safety Specialist for the Department. “This time of year powerful winter storms move across California, bringing our much needed rain and snow.

These same storms also produce powerful winter swells that impact the entire California coastline.”

Visitors to California’s coastal state parks should be aware of the rapidly changing conditions along the coast if they intend on entering the ocean. You should take the time to evaluate the conditions. “When in doubt—don’t go out.” advised Peabody, who likes to surf himself.

Along the coast the dangers can include:

- Colder water temperatures in the ocean--temperatures in the low to mid-fifty degrees are common from Southern to Northern California.
- Large, rough surf conditions.
- Strong powerful rip currents from the winter surf.
- Exposed beach and rock areas close to the surf line. These areas can seem safe from most breaking waves, but the pattern of breaking waves produces a periodic sequence of large, very strong surges that can wash over rocks and beaches great distances and take visitors by surprise. Watch from a distance, not up close!
- Fewer on-duty lifeguards in the winter than in the summer, so response time to a water emergency can be much longer.
- There is a risk of increased bacteria levels in the ocean for a period of at least 72 hours following the end of any measurable precipitation and runoff. Water contact should be avoided during this period near drainpipes, creek outlets, and river mouths.

Rescue statistics compiled by the Department for calendar year 2009 shows that State Park Lifeguards performed a total of 9,507 water rescues. “The majority of water rescues are accomplished by our seasonal lifeguard staff who are primarily employed during the summer months when visitation is highest.” said Peabody. “It is during the winter though when the most dangerous rescues are made by the remaining permanent lifeguards.” Statewide we have approximately 70 permanent lifeguards and lifeguard supervisors.

Peabody reminds park visitors that the first person responsible for safety is you. “Have fun, but think safety.”

For more information on aquatic safety in California State Parks, visit:

www.parks.ca.gov/aquaticsafety

Key Public Safety Message for a Safe Aquatic Recreation:

Park officials encourage the public to pay close attention to aquatic safety signs as they enter parks or access beaches. Contact your local state park office to learn the locations of the safest swimming areas.

Aquatic Safety Recommendations:

Learn how to swim!

When you are at the beach:

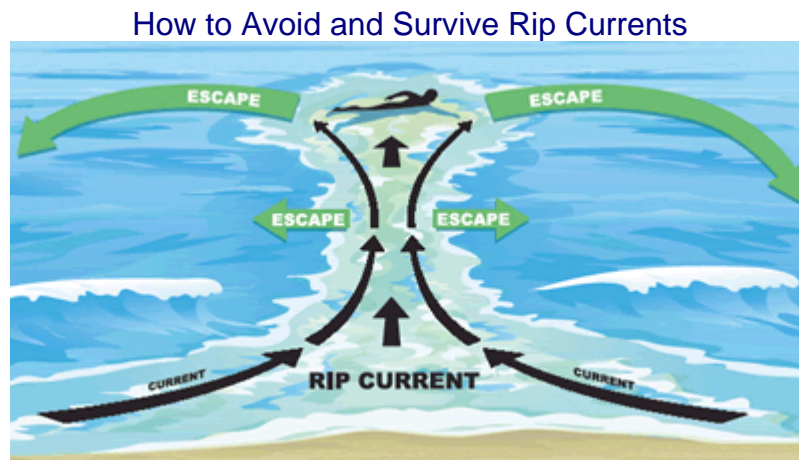
1. Whenever possible, **swim at a lifeguard-protected beach.**
2. Never swim alone.
3. Learn how to swim in the surf. It's not the same as swimming in a pool or lake.
4. Be cautious at all times, especially when swimming at unguarded beaches. If in doubt, don't go out. Never dive in head first. If caught in a rip current, remain calm to conserve energy and think clearly. Don't fight the current. Swim out of the current in a direction following the shoreline. When out of the current, swim towards shore.
5. Obey all instructions and orders from lifeguards. Lifeguards are trained to identify potential hazards. Ask a lifeguard about the conditions before entering the water. This is part of their job.
6. Stay at least 100 feet away from piers and jetties. Permanent rip currents often exist alongside these structures.
7. Pay especially close attention to children when at the beach. Even in shallow water, wave action can cause loss of footing.
8. Water and alcohol don't mix! Never swim after consuming alcohol or drugs.
9. When boating, always wear a personal flotation device.

If you see someone in trouble, get help from a lifeguard. If a lifeguard is not available, have someone call **9-1-1**. Throw the rip current victim something that floats and yell instructions on how to escape. **Remember, many people drown while trying to save someone else from a rip current.**

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The following diagram and information on Rip Currents courtesy of the USLA and NOAA

For more information on Rip Currents, go to www.usla.org



Learn how to swim!

- Never swim alone.
- Be cautious at all times, especially when swimming at unguarded beaches. If in doubt, don't go out!
- Whenever possible, swim at a lifeguard protected beach.
- Obey all instructions and orders from lifeguards.
- If caught in a rip current, remain calm to conserve energy and think clearly.
- Don't fight the current. Swim out of the current in a direction following the shoreline. When out of the current, swim towards shore.
- If you are unable to swim out of the rip current, float or calmly tread water. When out of the current, swim towards shore.
- If you are still unable to reach shore, draw attention to yourself: face the shore, wave your arms, and yell for help.
- If you see someone in trouble, get help from a lifeguard. If a lifeguard is not available, have someone call 9-1-1. Throw the rip current victim something that floats and yell instructions on how to escape. **Remember, many people drown while trying to save someone else from a rip current.**